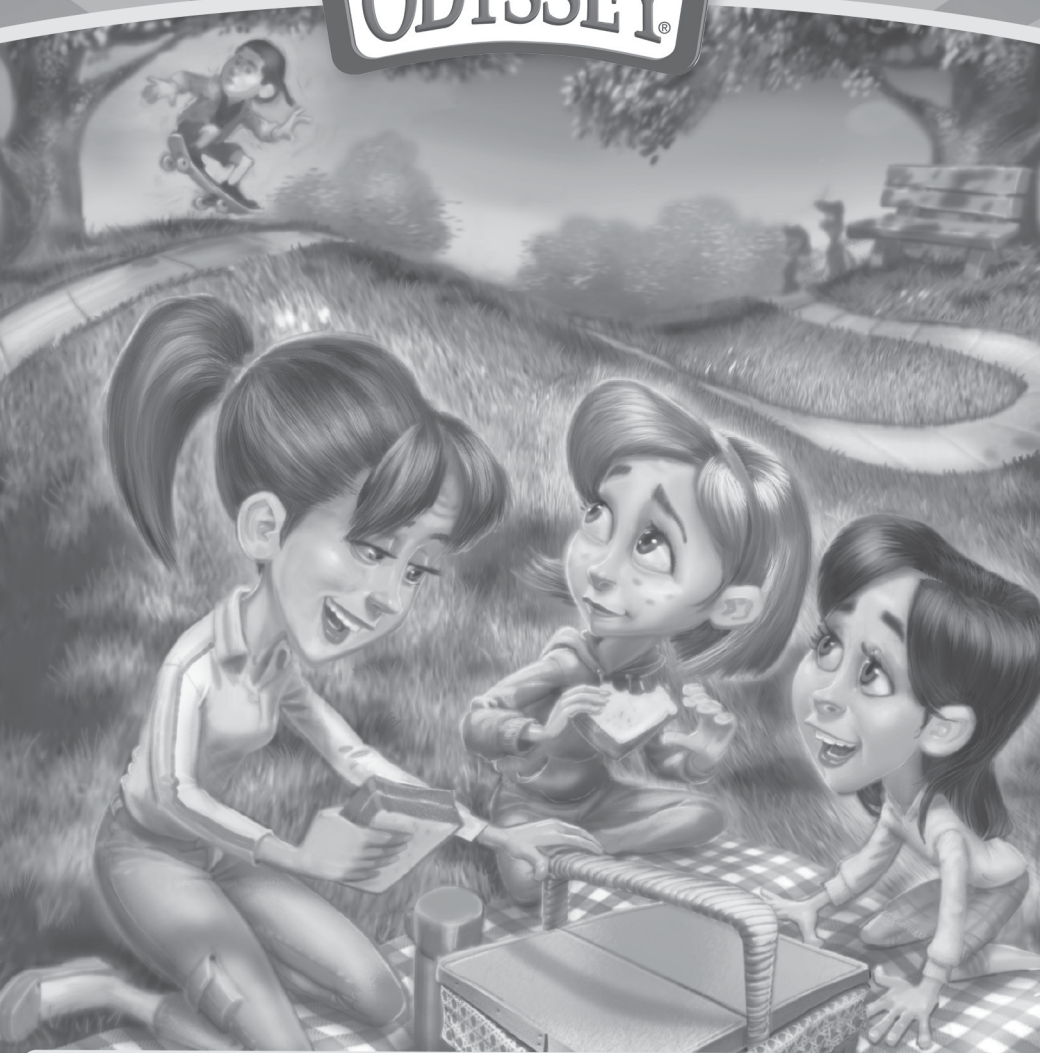


FOCUS ON THE FAMILY PRESENTS

*Adventures in*  
**ODYSSEY®**



**CANDID CONVERSATIONS with CONNIE, VOL 2**

**KATHY BUCHANAN**



*Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.  
Carol Stream, Illinois*

***Candid Conversations with Connie, Vol. 2:  
A Girl's Guide to Boys, Peer Pressure, and Cliques***

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*For my daughter, Maleah, who has taught me so much  
about faith, imagination, and the power of a hug.  
You brighten my life every single day.  
—Kathy Buchanan*





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# Introduction

It all started with an argument over pickle relish.

See, my friend Penny insisted that pickle relish makes everything better: hot dogs, omelets, french fries, egg salad . . .

“Egg salad?” I said. “You can’t put pickle relish in egg salad.”

“Egg salad can’t even be called egg salad without pickle relish,” Penny said. “That’s like a peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich without the bread!”

I disagreed. Strongly.

So we decided we’d each make egg-salad sandwiches according to our tastes, take them to Whit’s End, and find out which sandwich people liked better.

Olivia and Emily were sitting at the counter when we walked into the ice-cream shop. I pulled out the sandwiches.

“Are we having a picnic?” Olivia asked.

“That’s a fantastic idea!” Penny said.

So we dug up some strawberry ice cream, pineapple chunks, and a can of whipped cream to round out our picnic. (There weren’t a lot of options in the Whit’s End kitchen.) Then we set up in McAlister Park.

Camilla came over after she finished her soccer game. Tamika

had been reading under a tree and joined us too. And, well, pretty soon we had a whole crew of girls hanging out, enjoying the sunshine and pineapple chunks.

The conversation went from what's really in a can of whipped cream to which cloud looked the most like Jason Whittaker to how nerve-racking starting school next week would be for the girls.

"Why are you nervous?" asked Penny.

Well, this brought up a whole slew of answers: cliques, boys, snobs, and friends. Then more issues surfaced: *not* having friends, difficult friends, feeling awkward, being embarrassed, peer pressure, locker trouble, being made fun of, and eating cafeteria food.

"Being a teen is tough," said Olivia through a mouthful of pickle-relish-free egg-salad sandwich. (I've always liked Olivia.)

"Yeah, how did you survive it?" Tamika looked at me.

So we started talking about it. And I thought you might enjoy the conversation too!

I'm going to be sharing some of my most personal—and embarrassing—moments. Like how I got my head stuck in an owl costume, the day I called Larry Melwood a geek, and the weeks I spent crying into my pizza in the girls' locker room.

C'mon, there's room on the blanket and plenty of egg-salad sandwiches. If you stick with us enough, you'll even find out which kind of egg salad is best . . .



## CHAPTER 1

# Peppered Salami Is Underrated

(Knowing Who You Are)



**B**eing a teenager is kind of like walking into the cafeteria during the most epic, unbelievable food fight ever. Meat loaf, strawberry Jell-O, and limp green beans fly through the air like a UFO invasion. Mashed potatoes splat against your face. A blueberry cobbler is dumped on your head. An entire pizza flies across the room and makes a bull's-eye on the front of your sweater.

You rush from the cafeteria into the restroom. As you stand in front of the mirror, you hardly recognize yourself.

You get so covered by the concerns about what other people think, doubts about your worth, and the opinions the kids around you have about dating, fitting in, and growing up that you forget who you really are.

But here's one thing I've learned: to survive—and thrive—during these years, *you've got to know who you are.*

You've got to wash off the pressures, criticism, and embarrassing moments like that blueberry cobbler in your hair. Then live with confidence that the janitor will mop it up later. (Well . . . that's where the analogy breaks down, but you get what I mean, right?)

## Tales of a Seventh-Grade Outsider

For me, seventh grade brought my first pimple, a frizzy perm, and my bizarre fear of staplers.\* Yep, that's right . . . a fear of staplers.

Junior high was a time when I didn't really know who I was, so I tried to become what everyone else expected me to be. One of those everyones was Natalie VanUbenstein. She was running for student body president, and I volunteered to work on her campaign. I didn't know Natalie—except that she was really popular. I didn't know her plans for improving the school—except

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\* To hear Adventures in Odyssey audio dramas about Connie Kendall's life, visit [WhitsEnd.org](http://WhitsEnd.org)—and to find out more about this phobia, listen to “Mum's the Word,” episode 602, album 47, *Into the Light*.

to add more purple, which was her favorite color. And I didn't know how to help her campaign—except to hang purple posters all over school that said, “It's the time—vote VanUbenstein!” (It really was an unfortunate name for a person seeking political office.)

I was the last student to leave school the afternoon of the poster hanging. (I wanted Natalie to be impressed with my commitment.) But as I was stapling the last poster with my heavy-duty, easy-squeeze staple gun, I accidentally stapled my thumb to a bulletin board. Ow! I jerked back to pull away, but instead I unintentionally jammed the staple-gun trigger in the “on” position. It began spitting metal like crazy—stapling my sweater, hair, and somehow even my sock to the bulletin board!

I was stapled next to the school lunch menu for forty-five minutes before a janitor finally rescued me.

You can see how this would be traumatic. To this day, even the sound of a staple gun will cause me to jump ten feet in the air and cling to a ceiling fan.

Of course, having a phobia of staplers didn't help me fit in any better at school. It only made me feel more weird—more like an outsider. Like peppered salami in a world of deli turkey. Turkey just fits in. Everyone loves it. But it's the rare person who chooses salami. Everyone else in seventh grade seemed to know the right way to be. But somehow I was ziplocked into a stay-fresh bag of

cluelessness. I began to wonder, *What's wrong with me and how can I change?*

Since then, I've learned that my quirks are actually what make me "Connie." I mean, if I looked and acted and made decisions like everyone else, I wouldn't be Connie Kendall. I'd be Human Girl number 6,921,008,308 or something equally boring. But in junior high, I hated my quirks. My friends can relate:

TAMIKA: I got orange socks before school one year, and I was superexcited to wear them. I thought they were unique and fun. Until everyone started asking me if I'd lost a dare or if I realized how ridiculous I looked. Oops!

PENNY: I couldn't find my locker on the first day of junior high, so I thought, *Well, I'll just ask this nice, older girl. She'll help me out.* And she did. She gave me directions to the Dumpsters behind the gym. (I probably should have guessed the directions were wrong before I ended up outside.) Anyway, for years afterward, the upperclassmen called me Dumpster Girl. It got old. Actually, it was old as soon as they said it the first time.

OLIVIA: I wore jeans and a green T-shirt on the first day of eighth grade. My hair was pulled back in a ponytail. Amber Grayson sneered when I walked by. "Why are you dressed so strange?" she said. I thought I looked pretty

normal. “Nobody dresses like that,” she said and then walked away. Really?

CAMILLA: I felt so much pressure from other kids my age. I was trying to figure out how I was supposed to dress, look, and act. Should I wear a beret? Should I raise my hand in class? Should I talk to the girl wearing weird glasses? It seemed impossible to have it all together.

EMILY: All my friends were boy-crazy and wanted to know who I liked and who I didn’t like. But I didn’t even care. And they were like, “What? You don’t care?” And I felt like a freak.

These are *supercommon* problems: feeling peer pressure, fitting in, being made fun of, liking boys, and choosing friends. It’s easy to feel like you’re being attacked from all sides.

## Here's a Secret . . .

I wear a necklace with a cross on it as a reminder that God is always with me. And that what He says about me is truer than what anyone else says. Sometimes I just rub the cross with my fingers to remind myself I’m not alone. Maybe you’d also like to go get a necklace, bracelet, or ring to wear as a reminder that God is always by your side.

## When the Massive Food Fight Comes Your Way . . .

Over the next several years, you'll have a lot of things thrown at you. But getting around these dilemmas won't be as simple as dodging mashed potatoes in a food fight. You'll hear words from others (and even in your own head) telling you that you're not *enough*—not pretty enough, talented enough, cool enough, important enough. You'll wonder if you should change so a certain group of girls will accept you or so a certain boy will like you. You'll start questioning things that you know for sure now.

When all that comes at you, you must trust the truth about how God sees you. The Bible says you are His “chosen people,” “a royal priesthood” and “God’s special possession” (1 Peter 2:9, 2011). The knowledge of who you are in God’s eyes can make it easier to choose what words to believe and who your friends should be. And then it’ll be easier to make the right decisions. (Notice, I didn’t say easy—just easier.)

So when someone calls you a nasty name, you’ll know it’s not true. *Because you’ll know you’re amazing.*

Or when you feel pressure to drink alcohol because that’s what everyone else is doing, you’ll know you don’t have to. *Because you’ll know what your standards are.*

And when your friends are convinced that you’re nobody until you have a boyfriend, you’ll be able to laugh it off. *Because you’ll know you’re worth more than that.*

And when everyone judges you by what you wear or weigh or how your hair looks, you'll have a better perspective. *Because you'll know what's really important.*

And when you have that terrible, horrible day that you'd like to forget, you won't forget the *right* voice to listen to. Because one day you might trip on the softball field and cost your team the game, or start crying when you're giving a speech in front of the school, or flunk that chemistry exam, and then you'll hear a couple different voices:

VOICE NUMBER ONE: I'm a total loser, and I can't believe anyone would want to be my friend. No one wants me around. I just mess up all the time. I might as well hide from everyone. Who really cares what I do anyway?

Or . . .

VOICE NUMBER TWO: I messed up. I'm really disappointed in myself. I disappointed others, but that doesn't define who I am. God created me to be His daughter. I'm important and created for a purpose. God knows my whole story, and He's teaching me things. This matters. I matter. And even though I would've happily redone this day, I'm glad to be alive.

Which voice do you think God wants you to listen to?

You're entering a time when you'll likely grow up a lot—and that's something to be proud of. You'll laugh harder than you ever

have. You'll find the best friends you've ever known. You'll learn new things. Discover secret talents. Recognize interests and gifts you never realized you possessed. Enjoy all the fun things coming your way . . . without letting the food fights ruin them.

## Your Turn



This will be fun—really! Find an old notebook. Maybe last year's history book that's filled only halfway with notes. Or you can use the lines below. Start answering the following questions. (I asked the girls to do this, and they've shared some of their answers!)

1. *What do I believe?* This is a pretty deep question. But give it some thought. What do you believe about God and the Bible? Why do you think He created you? What's your purpose in the world?

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TAMIKA: I believe that God created me for a purpose and that He has a plan for my life. I believe that God loves me and that Jesus died to forgive my sins. I want to love God by obeying what the Bible says. Being honest, caring for others, and trying to be unselfish are important. Attending church and being with my family are important to me too.

2. *What am I good at?* You don't have to be an expert, but list your talents and skills—like athletics, relationships, hobbies, or whatever. You're probably good at more things than you think. You can even ask your parents or friends for their observations.

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This is what I wrote down in my journal: I'm a good writer, and I'm gifted at connecting with other people. I'm pretty friendly and outgoing. God has given me some organization and leadership skills. I'm good at encouraging others and giving them advice when they need it. I'm a decent public speaker. (Oh, and I make really delicious french toast.)

3. *What do I enjoy?* Think about things that make you happy—flavors, smells, activities—or people who make you feel really alive. You can even jot down favorite memories and moments. This is probably a list you'll add to over the years, because you'll always be finding new things you love.

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OLIVIA: I like spending time with my family, waterskiing, reading, acting, pruning lilacs, and teasing my little brother. My favorite ice cream is mint chocolate chip, and my favorite thing to do on a Saturday is go to Whit's End and try on different outfits in the costume room. I had the best time being the lead in a play Connie directed.

You may not know what you like to do at this point in your life. And that's okay, because now is your opportunity to experience new activities and find out where you fit in and shine the most! Go ahead and join the swim team and take art classes and write for the school paper. Audition for choir and the school play. Take up an instrument. Do anything that interests you. See what you enjoy. Then keep adding things to your list.

4. *List three qualities you hope people notice in you.* What are the character qualities people compliment you on? Or the things you most appreciate about yourself?

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OLIVIA: creative, funny, kind

CAMILLA: compassionate, athletic, likable

PENNY: wise, artistic, unique

TAMIKA: adventurous, hardworking, enthusiastic

EMILY: intelligent, curious, disciplined

You could use a ton more adjectives, too: Maybe you want to be known as cheerful, thoughtful, organized, friendly, imaginative, fun, strong, understanding, or brave.

5. *What are my goals?* Dream big with this. You might not know your future career—that's fine; very few teens do. (I'm *still* trying to figure out mine!) But think about things you'd like to do during your life. Have a family? Travel around the world? Go to college? Live in outer space? Cure cancer?

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CAMILLA: I want to get a soccer scholarship. Then I want to go back to Kenya to work in an orphanage for a year. My family went there last year, and the experience really made me realize what's important in life. And it's *not* having a lot of things. I think I'd like to grow up to be an animal keeper at a zoo or play on the US Olympic soccer team.

Then—and here's the *superimportant* part—learn how God sees you. Even when we don't see ourselves clearly, we can trust that God knows us better than we know ourselves. He's our FFF (Forever Father and Friend), which is way better than a BFF.

6. *What does the Bible have to say to me?* Jot down verses that have been important to you over the past few years. Take a look at the appendix on page 167. Read these verses out loud; really *think* about them. Circle all the truths where God says this is who you are! Do any of these verses stand out as ones you want to remember? If so, list them.

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